

Do You Have a Lucky Ark?

When you are frightened, what makes you feel safe? Some children I know have special toys or blankets that help them feel secure. Other children I know have a place to hide when they are afraid, and others have a lucky charm—a coin or stone or a piece of jewelry—that helps them feel protected.

A long time ago in Israel, some army men were looking for a way to feel safe. The war they had been fighting was going badly, and they were afraid that they would lose to the Philistines, who were fighting against them. Someone got the idea that if they took the Ark of the Covenant from God's tabernacle and brought it with them into battle, they would surely win.

Now I should tell you that the Ark of the Covenant was a piece of furniture in the tent where God was worshipped. It was in a place of honor and God wanted the people of Israel to treat it carefully, but He never meant for them to get confused. The Ark was a wooden chest overlaid with gold. It was not God. The Ark couldn't help anyone in a battle or make anyone safe—only God could.

The next day when the Israelites went into battle, they brought the Ark with them and something terrible happened! The Philistines won the battle and captured the Ark. The Philistines were very excited, because they thought they had captured the God of Israel. (But of course, we know better. We know that God doesn't live in a box or a church building and He can't be captured by anyone.) The Philistines thought that because they had the Ark, they would be safe.

The Philistines took the Ark home and put it in the temple of one of their false gods. This pretend god was a statue that was half fish and half man, like a mermaid (or a merman) called Dagon. Can you imagine how everyone went home to have dinner with their families and tell them about the great victory?

The next morning when the priests came back to Dagon's temple, they saw that the big fish-man statue had fallen over on its face before the Ark. It looked almost as if Dagon were worshipping the God of Israel! The priests quickly and carefully set Dagon upright. At the end of the day everyone went home again.



The next morning the priests came back to the temple. I think that they must have been feeling glad they had put Dagon back securely and that today they wouldn't see their god on the floor! But when they looked inside the temple, there he was. Dagon was face down before the Ark again, and this time his hands and his fish tail had broken off. They were not going to be able to worship this broken god any longer. If Dagon couldn't keep himself safe, how could he protect anyone else?

Soon the people in the city where the Ark was kept began to get sick. When they moved the Ark to another city, those people got sick, too. The Philistines knew that the God of Israel had caused this sickness. They also knew that He was the one who caused all the trouble for their false god Dagon. They had to get rid of the Ark!

God was showing them that just because they had captured the Ark, it didn't mean they could control God or use it as a lucky charm. God also showed everyone that He is greater than the pretend god, Dagon. I'm sorry to say that instead of wanting to learn more about such a powerful God, the people only wanted to feel better and go back to worshipping Dagon. The Philistines found a way to send the Ark back home on a cart pulled by two cows. Everyone was glad to be rid of it!

The Philistines were disappointed that they couldn't control God. They couldn't make Him bless them, and He didn't treat them with special favor just because they captured the Ark. Some people today think that they can control God, too. They think that if they go to church or if they do more good things than bad things or if they wear special religious medals, God will keep them safe. But that's not what the Bible says.

The Bible says that God is sovereign. That means He is a king. He can make the rules and do as He chooses. And to those people He chooses—the people who love God, who are trusting Jesus to take away their sins and who are trying to obey God—God is a safe refuge and a hiding place. Bad things may still happen in this life, but they know that they'll be safe in the next one—the one that goes on forever. I hope you are learning to trust God. He's the only one who can keep any of us really safe.

*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid.
Isaiah 12:2a ESV*

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